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ABSTRACT

Canada's school-to-work transition efforts have failed too many youth and adults because there has not been a framework for essential life and work skills for all to learn. These skills are needed to complement the academic and technical skills now required for completion of formal education and training. The Blueprint for Life and Work Design, adopted from the national career guidelines, are an attempt to solve this problem. The blueprint core competencies are sorted into three areas (personal management, learning and work exploration, and life-work building). Another competency deals with developing abilities for building positive relationships in life and work. Adopting such a framework and implementing curricula such as The Real Game series will help all ages master these skills. (Contains 17 references.) (JDM)

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Canada's School-to-Work Report Card: Grade F

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Canada's School-to-Work Report Card: Grade F

Prevailing wisdom in the twentieth century held that, given reasonable access to good career information and guidance, citizens will make good career decisions. The result would be improved human-resource allocation, labour-force mobility and productivity, and improved cost-effectiveness of employment, education, and training programs (Krumboltz and Worthington 1999). Many countries have invested heavily in developing and distributing print, video, computer and web-based resources on this premise. Watts (1999) makes a good case for it in *The Economic and Social Benefits of Career Guidance*. Recent analysis of school-to-work and work-to-work transition raises doubts about whether simply providing good information and guidance is sufficient to reap the benefits that Watts describes (Blustein, et.al. 1997; Krumboltz and Worthington 1999; Lent, Hackett, and Brown 1999; Savickas 1999; and Worthington and Juntenen 1997).

In addition to acquiring academic and technical skills, youth and adults need to learn essential life/work skills to become healthy, productive, and self-reliant. Gysbers (1997) refers to this concept as "life career development," defined as "self-development over a person's life span through the integration of the roles, settings, and events in a person's life." An important part of "life career development" is giving individuals life/work skills that empower them to locate and process information, and to make good choices at the many transition points they will inevitably encounter. These life/work skills are as important as the communications, mathematics, and science skills that all students are expected to acquire before completing formal education. Krumboltz and Worthington (1999) state that "The goals of career counseling and of the school-to-work movement should be to facilitate the learning of skills, interests, beliefs, values, work habits, and personal qualities that enable each participant to create a satisfying life in a constantly changing work environment," and Savickas (1999) suggests that students need to learn to "look ahead" and "look around" before they leave school, to develop competence and skill in five domains: (1) self-knowledge, (2) occupational information, (3) decision making, (4) planning, and (5) problem solving. According to Worthington and Juntenen (1997), "When employers are asked why they prefer not to hire youth, or why there are high turnover rates among youthful workers, they will tell you that today's

youth frequently fail to demonstrate essential employability skills." Employers implore educators to ensure that students "don't leave school without them," yet life/work skills have not found the prominence they deserve in mainstream curricula.

Canada prides itself in the quality and quantity of career and labour market information available for youth and adults. Resources like the National Occupational Classification, Job Futures, WorkinfoNET, Choices, Career Explorer, Career Cruising, Career Directions, Canada Prospects, *The Realm* and *The Edge* magazines, Destination 2020, Smart Options, and others are exemplary, and they are available across Canada. Yet, although most students have reasonable access to quality career information and guidance,

- 70% of secondary students expect to go on to post-secondary studies (university, college, technical or trade school), and 80% of their parents have the same expectation, but only 32% do actually go on directly to post-secondary, and only about 50% of them will graduate;

- 26% of secondary students nationally drop out of secondary school before graduation;

- 9% of secondary students expect to work after they leave secondary school, yet 64% of secondary students actually do go to work before any other career destination;

- 47% of post-secondary students change programs or drop out by the end of their first year, and half of those who graduate are not in work that is closely related to their programs two years after they complete their programs.

These statistics (from Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada School Leavers Survey 1997) suggest that fewer than one quarter of Canadian youth arrive at their short-term career goals, let alone longer-term goals.

Are the 64% of secondary students who go directly to work from secondary school ready? Perceptions vary. One recent survey (Environics Alberta 1997) yielded the following results to the question, "Are secondary students ready for work when they leave school?"

Response from	Ready for the: workplace	post-secondary
High-school students	80%	87%
Parents (K–12 students)	40%	65%
Post-secondary teachers	35%	53%
Employers	35%	70%

Secondary curricula focus on preparing students for post-secondary studies, yet most students will not go on to post-secondary studies. To receive a secondary diploma, students must master complex academic material that few will need immediately, if ever. At the same time, few students are systematically taught essential life/work skills that all need. In short, the majority of Canadian youth are not adequately prepared for life after secondary school. The system is failing them. It is testimony to their personal resourcefulness that most eventually find their way to acceptable, if not optimal, employment and lifestyles.

Adults encountering involuntary career transitions that result from privatization and "right-sizing," especially older workers, must overcome larger obstacles in reconnecting with work and learning opportunities. Many have responsibility for dependents, while dealing with lost income, shock, anger, fear, uncertainty, diminishing self-esteem and dignity, ageism, loss of identity, and emotional and financial risks, as they cope with transitions (Newman 1995).

The traditional goal of career interventions has been "to help people make informed career decisions." It was assumed that at some point, usually between their ninth to twelfth year of education, students could assess their interests and abilities, analyze their options, choose a suitable occupational goal, then develop and implement plans to reach their goal. Recent projections in Canada suggest that young people now entering the labour market are likely to experience a succession of different work roles during their lives, with as many as 25 jobs (with elements of multiple occupations) in up to five different industry sectors (Alberta Human Resources and Employment 1999). At times they may have concurrent part-time jobs, while at other times they may have no paid work. Work periods will be interspersed with periods of learning, either full-time or during evenings and weekends, while they hold one or more jobs. Krumboltz and Worthington (1999) describe a future

where "(...) there will be more of a need for worker flexibility as worker requirements change more frequently and new teams are formed to work on specific projects. Workers will increasingly be expected to move from project to project doing whatever work needs to be accomplished, and not merely to fulfill a written job description."

The frequent question from parents, teachers, and counsellors, "What do you want to be?" loses relevance in labour markets characterized by change of this magnitude and frequency. It is unrealistic, even self-defeating, to expect students to commit to one occupation for a lifetime. Any answer they give will be either incomplete or wrong. "Learning how to adapt to changing conditions in the workplace will be one of the essential skills for success" (Krumboltz and Worthington 1999). It is difficult for teachers and counsellors, who may work in the same building for much of their careers, to imagine this new work world, let alone prepare students for it.

The end of work is *not* in sight. With all our "labour-saving" technologies, people have never worked harder. The notion of jobs is shifting, and dramatically. Except in unionized settings, those who say "That is not my job!" are not likely to have one for long! Career is increasingly being viewed as something every human has, and the word is not being used as often synonymously with profession, occupation, or job (Gysbers 1997). The concept losing ground most rapidly is "occupation," yet it remains the cornerstone of most career information systems and databases, guidance processes, and vocational education and training enterprises.

Society expects youth and adults to define themselves in terms of an occupational goal, then choose education and training to prepare and qualify for their goal. Once on the path to their goal, they are graded on acquisition of academic and technical skills, not essential life/work skills. Academic and technical qualifications are needed to get an employer's attention, but life/work skills determine subsequent success and advancement (Krumbotz and Worthington 1999; Worthington and Juntenen 1997). Job seekers who market themselves as skilled in a narrow occupational specialty do themselves a disservice. Those who can describe the skills they bring as helping the organization meet its immediate challenges and achieve long-term success, in whatever combination of roles, are more in demand (Worthington and Juntenen 1997).

People need to identify broad work-sector destinations and secure foundation skills that will equip them to take on multiple roles within them. Mastery of the skills essential to the realization of their goals should be learned in mainstream curricula.

According to the school-to-work transition literature, a good school intervention would:

- include simulated work experiences that excite students with the opportunities presented and motivate them to explore their occupational possibilities with more enthusiasm (Krumboltz and Worthington 1999);
- teach students about the consequences of making decisions in life (Varenhorst 1968, 1973);
- allow students to test the adequacy of various decision making models (Krumboltz et al. 1982);
- allow students to sample various work roles (Krumboltz 1970);
- incorporate role-playing, which is found to be the most useful learning technique (Krumboltz and Worthington 1999);
- facilitate the learning of skills, interests, beliefs, values, work habits, and personal qualities that enable participants to create a satisfying life in a constantly changing work environment (Krumboltz and Worthington 1999);
- be developmentally appropriate and be distributed throughout the school years (Lent, Hackett, and Brown 1999);
- allow students to develop employability skills (Worthington and Juntenen 1997).

Mastering the skills needed to find and maintain fulfilling employment also equips people to be better students, marriage partners, parents, and citizens. What are these skills?

The Blueprint

Pioneering work on an essential life/work skills framework was begun by the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee in the United States in 1988, under the leadership of Juliette Noone-Lester. In 1998, adaptation of the *US National*

Career Development Guidelines for Canada began, resulting in the *Blueprint for Life/Work Designs*. Blueprint partners include the National Life/Work Centre, Human Resources Development Canada, provincial governments (Departments of Education and Labour), and national professional associations. Thousands of American and Canadian career practitioners and researchers have spent 12 years developing, piloting, evaluating, revising, and implementing this North American essential life/work skills framework.

The Blueprint core competencies are sorted into three areas (personal management, learning and work exploration, and life/work building). These competencies are further defined in four levels:

Level 1 Early years (primary/elementary)
Level 2 Middle years (junior high)
Level 3 Senior years (high-school)
Level 4 Adult (including post-secondary)

There are ten or more performance indicators for each competency, at each level, organized by "learning stages." Measurable standards are developed by implementing agencies for each indicator. For the full framework of competencies and indicators, refer to « http://www.blueprint4life.ca ».

Blueprint Competencies

Area A Personal management

1. Build and maintain a positive self-image
2. Interact positively and effectively with others
3. Change and grow throughout life

Area B Learning and work exploration

4. Participate in life-long learning that supports life/work goals
5. Locate and effectively use life/work information
6. Understand the relationship between work and society/economy

Area C Life/work building

7. Secure or create and maintain work
8. Make life/work-enhancing decisions
9. Maintain balanced life and work roles
10. Understand the changing nature of life and work roles
11. Understand, engage in, and manage one's own life/work building

To illustrate, the indicators for competency 2 at the high-school level follow:

COMPETENCY 2

Interact Positively and Effectively with Others

Level 3 (high-school)
Develop abilities for building positive relationships in life and work

Learning Stage 1 — Acquisition: Acquiring knowledge
- Discover the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to work effectively with and for others
- Explore helping skills such as facilitating problem solving, tutoring, and guiding
- Examine appropriate employee-employer interactions and client-contractor interactions in specific situations
- Explore personal management skills such as time management, problem solving, personal financial management, stress management, and life/work balance

Learning Stage 2 — Application: Experiencing acquired knowledge
- Demonstrate behaviours and attitudes required for working with and for others
- Demonstrate personal management skills such as time management, problem solving, budgeting and financial planning, stress management, life/work balance, etc.
- Express feelings, reactions, and ideas appropriately
- Demonstrate helping skills such as facilitating problem solving, tutoring, and guiding

Learning Stage3 —Personalization: Integrating acquired and applied knowledge
- Determine the helping skills one feels comfortable with and wishes to contribute in relationships with others
- Acknowledge the positive effects of expressing one's feelings, reactions, and ideas
- Integrate personal management skills such as time management, problem solving, stress management, and life/work balance to one's life and work

Learning Stage 4 — Actualization: Striving towards full potential
- Engage in further learning that helps build positive relationships in life and work

The Blueprint maps essential life/work skills that all of us need to proactively manage our life/work building. It also provides administrators and practitioners with a systematic method developing, implementing, evaluating, and marketing career-development programs or redesigning and enhancing existing programs.

A national framework of essential life/work competencies and indicators helps service providers achieve several aims:

- **Clear outcomes:** The Blueprint framework enables practitioners (and their funders) to clearly articulate and measure the outcomes they are seeking and achieving.

- **Service consistency:** A common language within and between services and products helps citizens know what they need, and get what they need, as they move from one service or product, agency or organization, or geographic region to another.

- **Efficiency:** A common language for life/work skills helps clients and practitioners more efficiently review, compare, and select programs and products.

- **Reduced ambiguity:** There are many assumptions about the meanings of terms such as career planning or self-awareness. Spelling out these assumptions for all to review enhances communication significantly.

- **Career development culture:** Having a common structure for discussion about career-development issues and aims helps everyone become more conscious of career development and life/work issues.

The Real Game Series

Essential life/work skills, like literacy and numeric skills, should be mastered by everyone at all stages of their education (Fouad 1997; Lent, Hackett, and Brown 1999; and Savickas 1999). Increased attention to these skills helps students see the relevance of their school studies, and can positively affect attendance, achievement, and completion rates. Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, New Zealand, Hungary, and Denmark are working together on The Real Game Series to help learners at all ages master essential life/work skills. The Real Game Series is everything the career transitions literature suggests that a good intervention program should be.

There are six programs in Real Game Series:

• The Play Real Game	Ages 6–8	Grades 3/4
• The Make It Real Game	Ages 8–10	Grades 5/6
• The Real Game	Ages 11–13	Grades 7/8
• The Be Real Game	Ages 14–15	Grades 9/10
• The Get Real Game	Ages 16–18	Grades 11/12
• Real Times, Real Life	Adults	Post-secondary to retirement

All programs involve role-playing and are set in participants' future. Realistic scenarios, based on contemporary labour market realities, are so engaging that participants don't realize they are learning. Participants establish lifestyles, budget time and money, move through job-loss and acquisition scenarios, plan business trips and vacations, balance family and work, and engage in community activities, in safe roles that allow risk-free experimentation. Students see clear connections between adult life and work roles and the subjects they are learning in school. "Students who believe that high school education has relevance for their future success are strongly and significantly more likely to work hard in school, even after parent, peer, school, and psychological variables are controlled" (Rosembaum and Nelson 1994). Teachers also learn about a broad cross-section of contemporary life and work roles, and have fun with their students!

These programs lend themselves to team teaching, involvement of student mentors, and participation by community members and parents. Participants are more motivated to seek out, process, and absorb traditional career and labour-market information resources (print, video, Internet). For more information, see www.realgame.com.

Conclusion

Canada's school-to-work transition efforts have failed too many youth and adults because we have not had a framework of essential life/work skills for all to learn. These essential life/work skills complement the academic and technical skills now required for completion of formal education and training. Adopting such a framework, and implementing curricula and resources such as The Real Game Series to help everyone master these skills, help more youth and adults become fulfilled and self-reliant.

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